

Besides the simplicity of architectural line and their work ethic, Merton also loved [the Shaker] dance. In fact, he wrote "The General Dance," as the final chapter of *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961) when he became interested in the Shakers. That section is a perennial favorite, which at the current time of Holy Easter 2004, calls for repetition of its theme of new life.

The Lord plays and diverts Himself in the garden of His creation, and if we could go out of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance... when, like the Japanese poet Basho we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash—at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the 'newness', the emptiness and the purity of vision that makes themselves evident, provide a glimpse of the cosmic dance.

For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast... no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not.

Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance (52-53).

This little work is a precious treasure for meditation and reflection by one of America's best known monks. Its editor, Paul Pearson, captures well the spirit of Shaker and Cistercian spirituality in his own Preface and opening chapter.

Mary Foreman, OSB

O'CONNELL, Patrick F. (ed.), *The Vision of Thomas Merton: Essays in Honor of Robert E. Daggy* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2003), pp. 253. ISBN 0-87793-991-8 (paperback). \$14.95.

Following two previous collections of essays—*The Message of Thomas Merton*<sup>1</sup> and *The Legacy of Thomas Merton*,<sup>2</sup> both edited by Brother Patrick Hart—*The Vision of Thomas Merton* marks an important continuation of such studies. This particular set of sapid essays demonstrate Merton's almost global applicability as well

as his ongoing relevance some thirty-six years after his death. Under the editorship of Patrick F. O'Connell, this book offers a dynamic, multifaceted look at one of the twentieth-century's most influential spiritual writers. Dedicated to the late Robert E. Daggy, the Publications Committee of The International Thomas Merton Society would be hard-pressed to find a better qualified team of contributors to write *The Vision of Thomas Merton*. The twelve featured essays come from friends and colleagues of Robert Daggy—all of whom represent the best of Merton interest and scholarship of the last twenty-five plus years. Readers will undoubtedly gain new insights and realizations about Merton as they hear from Bob Daggy's fellow editors of the two primary Merton publication projects, the five volumes of selected letters, the seven volumes of the complete journals as well as those who served as presidents or General Meeting program chairs of the Merton Society.

Although each contributor discusses Merton from quite different perspectives, a central theme throughout reveals Merton was much more than a monk and spiritual writer and that his influence both extends well beyond the cloistered walls of Gethsemani and crosses into a variety of disciplines, topics and interests. Even though he obviously remained a Trappist upon his commitment to Gethsemani in 1941, Merton's literal identity as monk and writer was but a starting point from which he eventually grew into an engagingly paradoxical seeker of Truth, a Catholic solitary with mass appeal. Robert Daggy's essay on Merton's bohemian/artistic parents—Owen and Ruth Jenkins—suggests that Merton's rocky yet progressive childhood served as a catalyst for his interests in nature, poetry, relationships, God, ideas, and politics, to name a few. Merton's childhood was likely instrumental when he (later on) began to earnestly explore key concepts inherent to monasticism: emptiness and mystery.

From a more literary perspective, Victor A. Kramer suggests that Merton's methodology changed dramatically as he matured: "...the complete journals subtly shift in the 1960s toward a far greater emphasis upon acceptance of mystery along with concurrently less emphasis on personal assurance" (78). Thomas Del Prete underscores Merton's acceptance of mystery in his appealing essay, "On Mind, Matter, and Knowing: Thomas Merton and Quantum Physics," which stresses that quantum physics excited Merton because of its interconnectedness to contemplation and the spiritual life. For Merton saw in Werner Heisenberg's "uncertainty

principle"<sup>3</sup> a particular correlation with St. John of the Cross and his "dark soul" hypothesis. Although operating from traditionally conflicting worldviews, Heisenberg and St. John ultimately share the same assumption about human life: mystery, not certainty, is its primordial sustenance.

As Merton progressed in the monastic life, he began to see more and more that most of his surroundings—both literal and metaphorical—were spiritual reservoirs waiting to be tapped for such nourishment and growth. Monica Weis, in her essay, "Dancing with the Raven: Thomas Merton's Evolving View of Nature," says Merton's contact with nature was a strongly significant influence that functioned in many distinct ways:

...as weather report, as trigger for memory, as analogy to explain the conundrums of life, as vehicle for his poetic eye, as language to mediate the ineffable experience of prayer, and finally, as healing influence to provide Merton with a sense of coming home (140).

This example is emblematic of Merton's ontological openness which is essential for understanding why he remains such a compelling guide and mentor for such a wide audience. Merton more or less embodied his influences, and he did so in a way that others could easily relate to.

Lawrence S. Cunningham says that in *The Asian Journal*<sup>4</sup> Merton identifies three elemental characteristics of monastic values that, ideally, should apply to anyone interested regardless of their religious tradition or lack thereof.<sup>5</sup> Merton coincidentally presented these fundamental elements to an interreligious group in Calcutta. The point is that this represents one of many examples throughout *The Vision of Thomas Merton* where Merton made himself and, more importantly, his message readily available and appealing to virtually any interested persons. Merton's uncanny ability to articulate his wide interests sets him apart. Erlinda Paguio examines his interest in the work of Indian art historian and philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy. William H. Shannon emphasizes Merton's relationship with Eastern wisdom as Bonnie Thurston explores Merton's contemplative awareness primarily through his *Thirty Poems* (1944). Jonathan Montaldo and Christine Bochen's essays remind us that Merton's faith journey was both fulgent and wearing. Merton articulates his faith well in-

cluding struggle and doubt. Montaldo uses this point to show why Merton's vision remains timeless: "Merton witnesses our dilemma for us and suggests its hard cure by exposing his weaknesses as an essential means of identifying with his life's only spiritual master, Jesus Christ" (106). Merton's relationship to Eastern thought, his growing ecological and sacramental consciousness, his sapiential theology and spirituality as well as his contemplative journey via poetry, prose, journals and photography show Merton's expansive, pluralistic vision as edification for virtually anyone willing to explore his life and writings.

Notes:

1. Patrick Hart, *The Message of Thomas Merton* [Cistercian Studies Series Number 42] (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981).

2. Patrick Hart, *The Legacy of Thomas Merton* [Cistercian Studies Series Number 92] (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986).

3. Through quantum physics, Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle" undermined Newtonian physics because it suggests that, at the subatomic level, matter cannot be seen, controlled or measured. See pp. 119-133 for further discussion.

4. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1973).

5. The three characteristics are: "(1) a certain distance or detachment from the ordinary secular concerns of life; a solitude of varying intensity and duration; (2) a preoccupation (Merton's word) with the radical inner depth of one's religious and philosophical beliefs, and their spiritual implications; (3) a particular concern with inner transformation and the deepening of consciousness of a transcendent dimension of life beyond the empirical self and of 'ethical and pious observances'" (70).

Glenn Crider

RINGMA, Charles R, *Seek the Silences with Thomas Merton: Reflections on Identity, Community and Transformative Action* (London: SPCK; Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), pp. xxv + 229. ISBN 0281056048 (British) (hardcover); 1553610911 (Canadian) (paperback). £9.99; \$24.95 CAN.

This engaging and attractive book consists of a series of short meditations on key dimensions of the Christian life, grouped in six sections, each with a brief introduction: "Being—The Search for Self-Identity" focuses on conversion and spiritual growth as a journey of self-discovery; "Being and Transcendence—The Search